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Viewing cable 07QUITO2570, ECUADORIAN ARMY'S 4TH DIVISION OPERATIONS AGAINST

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
07QUITO2570	2007-11-29 20:26	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Quito

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SUBJECT: ECUADORIAN ARMY'S 4TH DIVISION OPERATIONS AGAINST

THE FARC

Classified By: DCM Jefferson Brown for Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Ecuadorian Army's Fourth Division has engaged the FARC along the border with Colombia since November 19, 2007. This series of operations demonstrates previously uncharacteristic resolve and coordination by the Ecuadorian military to press the attack and to continue surveilling and patrolling its border to engage additional FARC camps. Recent training within the Ecuadorian military and new political and military leadership have provided an apparent new resolve by the GOE to control its Northern Border and to remove incursions of armed insurgents within its territory. End Summary.

¶2. (S) On November 19, 2007, the 4th Division of the Ecuadorian Army began a still ongoing operation of a series of military confrontations against the FARC in Puerto El Carmen de Putumayo, between Santa Rosa and Quinche, along the San Miguel river, in the Northeastern province of Sucumbios, along the Colombian border. The operation began after an exchange of fire between Ecuadorian military and FARC guerrillas at a known FARC camp. However, unlike the standard operating procedures of a brief exchange of fire and then retreat by the FARC, this initial exchange continued longer than normal; the FARC held its ground and the Ecuadorian military continued pressing the camp. Hours later, after the FARC had evacuated the site, blood and munitions were found at the FARC camp, along with documents and books which confirm that Luis Edgar Devia Silva (aka Raul Reyes), Secretariat Member, Spokesman and Advisor to the Southern Bloc of the FARC, was present at the camp. His presence and likely extraction from the site is a probable explanation for why the FARC did not immediately retreat. One FARC fatality was recovered by the Ecuadorian military and buried on site to avoid publicity as she was a young uniformed woman. Other FARC fatalities are likely but have not been confirmed.

¶3. (C) Since the beginning of these operations, the Fourth Division has encountered three guerilla bases, including munitions, grenades and camouflage, and FARC identification tags in the same region of the San Miguel River. The operation continues in its patrol and engagement of known FARC camps on various fronts and has sent in additional troops to relieve those initially involved in the operation. Troops from the 54th Special Operations Battalion Shushufindi, the 55th Jungle Battalion, the 24th Special Forces Group, other members of the 19th Jungle Brigade, and commandos from the Iwias Unit in Shell, Pastaza Province, have been deployed to control this zone along the Northern Border with Colombia. The Ecuadorian military has suffered injuries, still no fatalities, but the situation remains tense.

¶4. (S) General Fabian Narvaez, Commander of the Fourth Division, privately told the Embassy Military Group that the purpose of this mission was to "survey the area, locate and eliminate incursions of FARC guerrillas within Ecuadorian territory." To do so, the Fourth Division has employed five Super Puma and two Gazelle helicopters, coordinating with the Ecuadorian Air Force. One Super Puma and two Gazelles are now permanently based in Coca, Sucumbios. General Narvaez said that the Fourth Division is planning a more extensive operation in January 2008 after additional troops complete jungle operations training.

¶5. (S) General Narvaez said that his division had completely exhausted its supply of aviation fuel, has borrowed from the Ecuadorian Air Force, and pleaded for assistance from the USG to purchase additional fuel as well as for riverine operations. Embassy's Military Group has responded by providing 7,000 gallons of aviation fuel to the Fourth Division, and is looking to provide more. The Military Group has also ordered through NAS funding 22 still pending outboard motors to provide needed assistance in these Northern Border operations. General Narvaez also expressed

concern about confrontation with FARC camps in Ecuador that might be holding the three U.S. hostages. In response, Embassy Quito Military Group will provide training and assistance in personnel recovery.

¶6. (S) The operational capability for the Ecuadorian Army to patrol its Northern Border has improved somewhat after General Narvaez took leadership of the Fourth Division in July 2007. During a recent visit to LagoAgrio, Sucumbios, by WHA DAS Christopher McMullen and Ambassador Linda Jewell, General Narvaez commented that the Fourth Division was not fully trained and equipped to conduct needed operations along the Northern Border, and that his troops have undergone a three-month program of training. Since the training, Narvaez sent all six of the Fourth Division's Long Range Reconnaissance and Surveillance (LRRS) teams have been sent to various fronts along the Northern border to observe known FARC camps and take photos and videos.

¶7. (C) Political will may have also increased after Ecuadorian Minister of Defense Wellington Sandoval's fact-finding trip to the Northern Border on November 6. MOD Sandoval went to determine the validity of reported incursions by Colombian military into Ecuadorian territory on November 3. The MOD was surprised to find a heavier than expected FARC presence and an unwillingness of the local population to reveal this presence. On November 13, Sandoval said that "Ecuador maintains a border with the FARC or the ELN, and Bogota does not maintain effective control of its border region with Ecuador." On November 26, Minister Sandoval stated, "We will not permit armed persons within our territory. This is a sovereign country that we must defend and respect; we cannot have (foreign) armed troops here, and if we do, we must remove them."

¶8. (C) Comment. New military leadership appears to have presented the GOE with a renewed commitment to patrol and control the Northern Border with Colombia. President Correa's fervor with regard to sovereignty adds an additional impetus to this commitment. The current operation has received significant press coverage. Long-term political will may be challenged if the Ecuadorian military incurs fatalities. An increase in Ecuadorian military engagement along the border with Colombia could also spark an increase in activity by the FARC in the region. End Comment.
JEWELL

=====CABLE ENDS=====